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ABSTRACT

While an abundance of research and related literature concerning the pressing problem of student attrition from institutions of higher education can be found, few published materials or reports can be found which have as the focal point the community college student athlete with respect to the dropout syndrome; particularly with regard to how he compares with his counterpart--the student nonathlete. This report is focused on the student/athlete--student/nonathlete attrition question. (Author/SGM)

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PERCEPTIONS: CAUSES FOR ATTRITION/RETENTION: THE STUDENT/ATHLETE AND THE STUDENT/NON-ATHLETE IN COMMUNITY JUNIOR COLLEGES

BY

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I N T R O D U C T I O N

The student attrition rate is a problem of national concern of colleges and universities in general. In view of their stated philosophy, attrition is an area of particular concern to the community colleges. In general terms, the attrition rate refers to the proportion of students withdrawing from college or failing to re-enroll after one or more terms after original entry but prior to completion of their stated educational objectives. (Wenzel and Hansen: 1963).

A review of the literature indicates a rather impressive amount of research regarding the attrition problem. Oft mentioned factors in research reports are: unrealistic image of college life (Rouech: 1967); low grades, inadequate progress and unsatisfactory attendance (Pearch: 1966); the importances of family problems, jobs, institutional grading practices, as well as a variety of institutional characteristics (Ellich: 1969).

While an abundance of research and related literature concerning the pressing problem of student attrition from institutions of higher education can be found, few published materials or reports can be found which have as the focal point the community college student-athlete with respect to the drop-out syndrome. Particularly with regard to how he compares with his counterpart -- the student/non-athlete.

THE PURPOSE

The purpose of this study was to compare reasons for attrition among entering freshman class student-athletes with the entering class of freshman student/non-athletes of selected community colleges. More specifically, to determine if there is a significant difference in reasons for attrition between the two groups of students. Supplemental data was obtained to determine the extent to which community college student-athletes graduated and subsequently secured an athletic scholarship to a four-year institution of higher education.

METHODOLOGY

In the fall of 1973, a sample of 200 community colleges accredited by the North Central Accreditation Association was randomly selected from those community colleges listed in the 1973 Community and Junior College Directory.

A questionnaire was designed and mailed to the Student Personnel Directors in each community college soliciting information concerning general information about their college and student/non-athletes. Similarly, another questionnaire was designed and mailed to Athletic Directors and/or Varsity Football/Basketball Coaches in each college soliciting similar information regarding their athletic program and student-athletes.

The response rate to the questionnaire was 148 returns (74 percent) for Student Personnel Directors, and 136 returns (68 percent) for the Athletic Directors and/or Varsity Football/Basketball Coaches.

The obtained data was then statistically analyzed to obtain ranges and percentages; an analysis of variance test was run to determine whether

reasons for attrition between the student-athlete and student/non-athlete differed.

While the major thrust of this study centered on a comparison of reasons for attrition among student-athletes and student/non-athletes, Student Personnel Directors were also asked to supply data on: enrollment size over the past three years, entrance criteria, entrance examinations, supportive services available to all students, whether or not official records and/or statistics of general student attrition were maintained, and the percentage of those students which had left college prior to completing their degree objective.

The figures in Table I indicate that a large portion of those community colleges surveyed (70.9%) had enrollments of over 900 students. The major criteria for entrance (Table I) was the high school diploma (81.8%); however, 33.1% of those Student Personnel Directors polled did indicate that they would admit students who had reached legal age. The American College Test (ACT) was the most preferred entrance examination (53.3%) by the participating institutions. On the other hand, (42.0%) noted that no examinations were required.

All community colleges surveyed provided some kind of supportive services for their students (Table I). Of some note is the fact that 60.8% of the Student Personnel Directors indicated that their college provided all three indicated services (financial aid, reading laboratories, and tutorial services) for their student enrollees. Over 39% of the Student Personnel Directors listed that their college provided financial aid for their students; 16.9% indicated that their college provided reading laboratories; 14.9% of the Student Personnel Directors noted that their college supplies tutorial services.

TABLE I

SELECTED CHARACTERISTICS OF COMMUNITY COLLEGES*

Characteristic	(N = 148) Percent of Total Sample
SIZE OF COMMUNITY COLLEGE	
Less than 500	9.8
500 - 900	20.3
900 - Over	70.9
ENTRANCE REQUIREMENTS**	
High School Diploma	81.8
Legal Age	33.1
No Specific Requirement	20.3
ENTRANCE EXAMINATIONS	
Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT)	4.7
American College Test (ACT)	53.3
No Exam Required	42.0
SUPPORTIVE SERVICES AVAILABLE**	
Financial Aid	39.2
Reading Lab	16.9
Tutorial Service	14.9
All of the Above	60.8
None of the Above	00.0
RECORDS AND STATISTICS OF GENERAL STUDENT ATTRITION	
Yes	75.7
No	24.3
STUDENT ATTRITION	
24% - Lower	25.6
25 - 59%	43.3
50 - 74%	18.2
75% - Higher	3.0
No Response	20.9

*As reported by Student Personnel Directors
** Percentages do not total 100 because multiple responses were possible

Regarding official records and statistics of general student atttition, the figures in Table I suggest that only 79.7% of the Student Personnel Directors maintain official records and statistics of general student attrition. While 20.9% of the Student Personnel Directors preferred not to respond to the question "What percentage of the general student population, over the past three years, have left their college prior to completing their degree objective?" 43.3% indicated losses between 25-49 percent of their students had left college prior to completing their degree; 25.6% of the Student Directors noted losses of 24 percent or lower; with 18.2% noting losses of 50 - 74 percent.

TABLE II

SELECTED CHARACTERISTICS OF ATHLETIC PROGRAMS *

Characteristic	(N = 136) Percent of Total Sample
ATHLETIC PROGRAM IN**	
Basketball	99.3
Football	33.1
RECRUITING PROGRAM	
With	89.0
Without	11.0
ATHLETIC SCHOLARSHIPS	
Some Athletes	62.5
All Athletes	19.1
None of the Athletes	18.4
ITEMS INCLUDED IN ATHLETIC SCHOLARSHIP**	
Tuition	50.7
Books	32.4
Room and Board	21.3
Fees	21.3
All of the Above	28.7

*As reported by Athletic Directors and/or Varsity Football/Basketball Coaches
**Percentages do not total 100 because multiple reasons were possible

Selected characteristics of athletic programs as reported by Athletic Directors and/or Varsity Football/Basketball Coaches are reported in Table II.

Every college polled had an intercollegiate varsity athletic program in their college. The major sport offered by the majority of the colleges was basketball (99.3%). Only 33.1% of those colleges surveyed also provided football as part of their intercollegiate athletic program.

The responses from Athletic Directors and/or Varsity Football/Basketball Coaches regarding recruitment of varsity athletes for football and basketball programs (Table II) indicate a very high percentage (89.0%) do recruit their athletes. The study also revealed that a majority of the Athletic Directors and/or Varsity Football/Basketball Coaches (62.5%) were selective in their distribution of athletic scholarships (Table II).

Items included in athletic scholarships varied from college to college (Table II). However, tuition (50.7%) headed the list of items most frequently included. Books were the second major item included (32.4%) followed by room and board and fees (21.3%). Important too, is that almost 30 percent (28.1%) of the athletic programs provided all of the above mentioned items in an athletic scholarship.

Data was also gathered from Athletic Directors and/or Varsity Football/Basketball Coaches regarding selected characteristics of their student-athletes.

TABLE III

SELECTED CHARACTERISTICS OF STUDENT-ATHLETES*

Characteristic	Percent (N = 136) of Total Sample
COMMON REASONS FOR COMING TO COLLEGE	
Scholarship	62.5
Inability to Qualify at a Senior Institution	20.9
Closeness to Home	17.6
PERCENTAGE UNABLE TO ATTEND COLLEGE WITHOUT FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE	
24% - Lower	12.5
25 - 49%	25.7
50 - 74%	38.2
75% - Higher	18.4
No Response	5.2
FAMILY INCOME LEVELS OF STUDENT ATHLETES UNABLE TO ATTEND COLLEGE WITHOUT FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE	
Under $5,000	24.3
$5,000 - $9,999	69.0
$10,000 - $14,999	5.9
$15,000 - Higher	0.7
EXTENT TO WHICH DUAL-ROLE (STUDENT & ATHLETE) LEADS TO ATTRITION	
Increase	31.6
Decrease	46.3
No Factor	19.9
No Response	2.2
STUDENT ATHLETES RECEIVING ATHLETIC SCHOLARSHIP TO A SENIOR COLLEGE OR UNIVERSITY	
24% - Lower	25.0
25% - 49%	25.0
50% - 74%	27.9
75% - Over	20.6
No Response	2.5

*As reported by Athletic Directors and/or Varsity Football/Basketball Coaches

Table III provides evidences concerning the major reason for student-athletes selecting a community college to further their education. Of those student-athletes who went to a community college, 62.5% went because they were offered an athletic scholarship. Inability to qualify at a senior institution (20.9%) was the second major reason. Also of significance is that over half (56.6%) of the Athletic Directors and/or Varsity Football/Basketball Coaches reported that in their estimation, 50% to 75% of their student-athletes would have been unable to attend their college if financial assistance (through athletic scholarship) were unavailable. (Table III).

Similarly, evidence provided by Athletic Directors and/or Varsity Football/Basketball Coaches shows that of those student-athletes coming from family income levels of less than $10,000, 93.3% would have been unable to attend college without the financial assistance obtained from the athletic scholarship. (Table III).

In the opinion of Athletic Directors and/or Varsity Football/Basketball Coaches, 46.3% noted that the dual role of student and athlete increased the potential for athletes remaining in college until he attained his degree objective. Over 31% of the Athletic Directors and/or Varsity Football/Basketball Coaches believed the dual role did increase attrition among athletes, while less than 20% suggested that it was not a factor. (Table III).

In Table IV, the statistics indicate, aside from athletic ability, 61% of the coaches consider self-confidence to be ranked first or second in importance as an attribute they would like their athletes to possess. High aspirations (50.7%) was next to be so ranked.

TABLE IV

SELECTED TRAITS OF ATHLETES,
RANKED IN ORDER OF IMPORTANCE TO COACHES

(Percent of Total Sample)

Level of Importance Ranking	High Achievers	Self-Confident	Defined Goals	High Aspirations
1	19.9	27.9	16.9	31.6*
2	17.6	33.1	25.7	19.1

*This means that, other than athletic ability, high aspirations was the most important characteristic coaches sought in student-athletes.

TABLE V
SELECTED COMPARISONS OF
STUDENT/NON-ATHLETES AND STUDENT ATHLETES*

	Student/Non-Athletes (N - 148) Percent of Total Sample	Student Athletes (N = 136) Percent of Total Sample
GEOGRAPHIC ORIGINS**		
Locally	80.4	33.8
Regionally	17.6	43.1
Nationally	2.0	23.3
INCOME LEVELS***		
Under $5,000	6.1	14.7
$5,000 - $9,999	53.4	62.5
$10,000 - $14,999	35.8	29.1
$15,000 or More	4.7	0.7
HIGH SCHOOL RANK****		
Bottom 1/2	42.6	58.8
Top 1/2	55.4	14.0
Top 1/3	2.3	1.5
Upper Quartile	0.7	0.7

*As reported by Student Personnel Directors and Athletic Directors and Athletic Directors and/or Varsity Football/Basketball Coaches.
**Significant at .01 level (F = 77.24, DF = 1,270)
***Significant at .01 level (F = 13.71, DF = 1,273).
****Siginificant at .01 level (F = 21.99, DF = 1,243).

In comparing the two groups of students, (Student/non-athletes and student-athletes), the data presented in this study found that the majority of student/non-athletes come primarily from local communities (80.4%). On the other hand, student-athletes originate from broader geographical areas; 43.1% coming from regional areas, 33.8% coming from local areas and 23.3% nationally. (Table V).

The figures in Table V further indicate that more student/non-athletes come from higher income brackets than student-athletes. The Student Personnel Directors surveyed indicated that 59.5% of all student/non-athletes have family incomes of $10,000 or less. On the other hand, 77.2% of all student athletes come from income brackets of $10,000 or less.

Although the percentages of those ranking in the bottom one-half of their high school class do not appear significant, (43% and 59% respectively), the discrepancy occurs in other significant findings. Responses to the questionnaire indicated that 55.4% of the student/non-athletes rank in the top 1/2 of their high school class, whereas only 14% of the athletes originate from the top one-half. (See Table V)

Reasons for not completing degree requirements: (See Table VI)

A. The importance of scholastic difficulties as a factor in not completing degree requirements was not significantly different for athletes and student/non-athletes. For both groups, scholastic difficulties had a modal ranking of third.

B. Athletic Directors and/or Varsity Football/Basketball Coaches rank "Transfer to a senior institution" significantly higher as a reason for not completing degree requirements than Student Personnel Directors. 58.8% of Athletic Directors and/or Varsity Football/Basketball Coaches rank it first compared to 24.3% of Student Personnel Directors ranking it first.

C. Student Personnel Directors rank "Personal Problem" significantly higher than Athletic Directors and/or Varsity Football/Basketball Coaches as a reason for not completing degree requirements, (27% vs. 43.4% ranking it third or fourth).

D. "Dissatisfaction with College" was ranked significantly lower by Athletic Directors and/or Varsity Football/Basketball Coaches than by Student Personnel Directors as a reason for not completing degree requirements. Almost half of the Athletic Directors (45.6%) ranked it last, while only about a fourth (25.7%) of the Student Personnel Directors so ranked it.

TABLE VI

REASONS FOR NOT COMPLETING DEGREE REQUIREMENTS
AS REPORTED BY STUDENT PERSONNEL DIRECTORS AND
ATHLETIC DIRECTORS AND/OR VARSITY FOOTBALL/BASKETBALL COACHES*

	RANKS OF IMPORTANCE							
	I		II		III		IV	
	**SA	SNA	SA	SNA	SA	SNA	SA	SNA
Scholastic Difficulties***	24.3	16.2	25.0	30.1	30.1	24.3	14.7	18.2
Transfer to Senior Institution****	58.8	24.3	11.0	21.6	8.1	15.5	15.4	12.8
Personal Problems*****	8.8	25.0	37.5	29.1	34.6	16.2	8.8	10.8
Dissatisfaction with College******	5.9	14.2	19.1	6.8	14.7	16.2	45.6	25.7

*39.2% of the Student Personnel Directors rank all four choices. 48.6% of the Athletic Directors and/or Varsity Football/Basketball Coaches rank all four choices.
** SA = Student Athlete SNA = Student/Non-Athlete
***Not Significant
****Significant at.01 level (F = 9.86, DF = 3.14)
*****Significant at .01 level (F = 9.16, DF = 3.02)
******Significant at .05 level (F = 6.10, DF = 2.47)

Degree objectives of athletes and student/non-athletes:

A. 63.4% of the Athletic Directors responding to the survey report that 60% or more of their athletes have as a degree objective the Associate of Arts Degree for transfer compared to 49.9% of Student Personnel Directors reporting student/non-athletes have such a degree objective.

B. According to the survey, athletes and student/non-athletes did not differ significantly in terms of percentages having as a degree objective, a 2 year occupational degree, a planned diploma or equally divided between transfer and an occupational degree.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The focus of this study attempted to address itself to a central problem in community colleges -- that of attrition. Particularly, the reason for attrition among student athletes and student/non-athletes.

The data presented in this paper indicated that reasons for attrition between the two groups of students did vary. However, Athletic Directors and/or Varsity Football/Basketball Coaches did note that transfer to a senior institution was the most significant reason for their athletes not completing their degrees. On the other hand, Student Personnel Directors noted personal problems, primarily, as a reason for student/non-athletes not completing their degree requirements.

Noticeable too, is that this study found that while student/non-athletes come from higher family income levels as well as higher high school scholastic levels, more student-athletes did have as their degree objective the Associate of Arts Degree for transfer.

Further, the findings revealed that:

A. Coaches were selective in their distribution of athletic scholarships to perspective student athletes.

B. Self-confidence and high aspirations were the traits most looked for in potential student-athletes by coaches.

C. The dual-role of student and athlete tended to increase the institution's holding power of student-athletes.

D. Student-athletes go to a community college primarily because they were offered an athletic scholarship.

E. Student-athletes and student/non-athletes differed significantly in their reasons for attrition:

(1) Student-athletes were more prone to leave college for reasons of "transfer to senior institution."

(2) Student/non-athletes left college more frequently because of "personal problems."

Hence, the inclusion of inter-collegiate varsity athletic programs within community colleges provides a viable opportunity to attract stu ıts that might have otherwise been unable to further their education beyond the high school level.

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